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Russian baptisms mark hope for future

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec.2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

MOSCOW (BP) — Early on a chilly summer morning, Southern Baptist missionaries Brad and Lori Stamey shiver with a small group of Christians on the bank of the Moscow Canal. They cheer as two women emerge dripping, trembling from the canal's frigid waters, and smiling with joy.

Anastasia, age 80, and Mariana, in her 30s, are the first believers baptized through a mission congregation sponsored by Good News Baptist Church.

Mikhail ("Misha") Chekalin, pastor at Good News and leader of Moscow's 28-member Baptist church association, baptizes the women. Genady Krechin, pastor of the mission church that meets in his apartment, stands on the bank with the Stameys.

"Watch what Misha's doing," Brad urges Krechin, who will soon be ordained. "You'll be doing it next summer!"

Krechin grins, several gold teeth flashing in the morning sun. It's a moment to savor because the two have met at least weekly for more than a year in a Paul-Timothy relationship. Now Krechin is



FIRST BAPTISM — Missionary Brad Stamey (right) and Russian Baptist church starter Genady Krechin pray before observing the Lord's Supper during the first baptism service for Krechin's house church in Moscow. (IMB photo)

ready to lead his young church and mentor his own Timothy followers.

"You can talk about rapid reproduction, but that's about as rapid as it happens here," Brad explains. "If the Lord starts a church-planting movement here, things will be happening so fast we won't be able to keep track of it."

That's a day Brad and Lori long to see.

For now, though, they're working patiently and methodically with Chekalin, Krechin, and other Russian church planters to begin at least one Baptist congregation in each of the 16 sections of Moscow's Northern Administrative District — home to more than one million people.

Krechin's congregation, in an area where 85,000 people live, marks the third such church start. Thirteen sections still lack a single church.

"It's overwhelming," Brad admits. "You can get discouraged here and we have, several times."

Reaching the district with its endless blocks of apartment buildings, however, is a lot less overwhelming than reaching all of Moscow. That was the Stameys' assignment when they returned to the city in 1998 as career missionaries after serving a two-year

term as journeymen in the early '90s.

"Winter here is just devastating for morale," Brad says of Moscow. "It's not just the snow and the cold, it's the lack of light. The sky is gray. The trees are gray. The buildings are gray."

They've learned, however, that God uses their presence to encourage others.

"He's doing more than we realize sometimes, working in peoples' lives and drawing them to Him," Lori says. "We hope our presence will result in lots of churches being started, but our job is to be obedient to what He gives us to do. It's His job to start the churches, and He will in His timing."

Meanwhile, more light is shining in the Northern district as the Stameys and their "Co-laborers Team" of Russians and missionaries spread the Gospel. Aided by Southern Baptist volunteers, they have prayerwalked most of the district and delivered thousands of cards to apartment dwellers, offering free Bibles and invitations to evangelistic events.

People who respond become prospective members of seeker Bible studies and prayer groups, which may, in turn, become churches one day.

The work may be slow, but it's laying a solid foundation.

Pray for spiritual awakening in each of Moscow's major districts, for wisdom as workers "seek the seekers," and for the Russian church planters God is raising up. Interested in working with the "Co-laborers Team" as a volunteer, prayer supporter or "church champion" dedicated to reaching part of Moscow's Northern district. E-mail brasta@everyheart.net.

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the story of Jesus

What will you give so they can hear?

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

EDITOR
William H. Perkins Jr.
wperkins@mbcb.org

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Tony Martin
tmartin@mbcb.org

LAYOUT/DESIGN
Matt Broome
mbroome@mbcb.org

ADVERTISING
Dana Richardson
drichardson@mbcb.org

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Brenda Quattlebaum
bquattlebaum@mbcb.org

EDITOR EMERITUS
Don McGregor

Baptist Record Advisory Committee:

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Postmaster:

Send changes of address to: The
BAPTIST RECORD, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Send news, communication, and
address changes to: The Editor,
BAPTIST RECORD, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Tel: (601) 968-3800

Fax: (601) 292-3330

E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org

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Remember the martyrs, always

The year 2007 has brought many great advances in the quest to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Opportunities that existed only in dreams a few years ago all of a sudden became reality.

Doors opened that had been closed for decades. The eyes, ears, and hearts of so many people were tuned to hear and understand the Gospel message, that it seemed the whole world was yearning to know. More Mississippi Baptists than ever went to more places to witness to more people than anyone could have imagined, and the missions tempo is quickening as we look forward to 2008.

Before we direct our prayers and our resources to the future and its enormous potential, however, we should take a moment to give God the glory for the victories gained in His service during 2007 — and remember the martyrs. Always, we should remember the martyrs.

A few short hours before 2003 dawned, three Southern Baptist missionaries lost their lives and a fourth missionary was wounded at Jibla Baptist Hospital in Jibla, Yemen. Surgeon Martha Myers,

hospital administrator Bill Koehn, and supply manager Kathleen Gariety were murdered by a Muslim extremist as they went about their normal hospital duties. Pharmacist Don Caswell was critically wounded but has recovered and returned to the mission field.

In the time that has transpired since the shootings, the hospital has been transferred from the International Mission Board to a local Yemeni charity and the gunman has

been executed by the Yemeni government. The hospital is in other hands, but the missionaries who were martyred there should never be forgotten.

Judy Williams, a surgeon at the Jibla hospital, told international reporters covering the shootings, "These individuals deeply loved and cared for the people of Yemen. They freely chose to serve the people of this country, and although their lives on earth have ended, nothing was taken from them that they hadn't already freely given."

While Southern Baptists were still reeling from the Jibla tragedy, missionary William P. "Bill" Hyde was killed at the Davao City airport in Philippines.

Hyde was at the airport to pick up a Southern Baptist missionary family returning from a short vacation when a terrorist bomb exploded. The crime has not been solved and no suspects were ever arrested.

Family friend Ed Gregory, missions team leader for the Baptist Convention of Iowa, described Bill Hyde as a spirited missionary who "kept retraining, fulfilling different roles, teaching, church planting. He was constantly developing Filipino pastors, helping them get new work started, and then mentoring them in their roles."

The loss of these four great men and women has been a blow to all of us, but we must press onward toward the prize.

During this war against terrorism in which we currently find ourselves, national political leaders are quick to remind us that the battle will be long and hard-



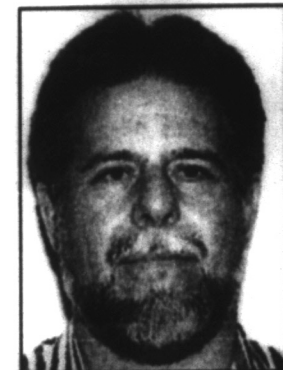
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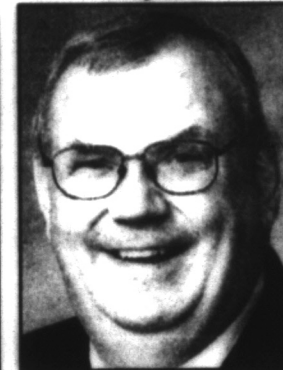
Koehn



Myers



Caswell



Hyde

fought, that those who fall in battle will be many, and that the cause will ultimately be worth the steep price we are now paying.

The same can be said of the spiritual warfare that rages all around us. The battle that Christians have been fighting for 2,000 years has also been long and hard-fought, and the casualties have been high. However, we already know the great victory is ours.

May we walk boldly in the big footprints left by the martyrs, and may we lift high the banner for which they died. Their blood demands no less from us, the people privileged to be called Christians.

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec.2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union collapsed two years later, the world changed. Southern Baptists responded rapidly, sending hundreds of missionaries and thousands of volunteers to spread the Good News and help local Baptists.

Hundreds of millions in the former Soviet Union search for God but are ignorant of His love and mercy. Their hearts have been brutalized and corrupted, first by communism and later by the free-for-all greed that swept post-Soviet Russia and its satellite nations.

Hearts literally are starving for the story of Jesus and the liberation that faith in Him can bring.

Fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, many doors remain open but could close at any moment. Some doors already are shutting as governments in the region restrict ministries, deny visas, and send foreign workers home.

Yet more than 280 million people in 350 unreached people groups — more than 90 percent

GUEST OPINION:



Millions still waiting to hear

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

of all people groups in the vast region — still don't know Jesus is Lord and Savior of all peoples, including them.

Action needed

The time to pray passionately, to give sacrificially, to act boldly is now. Southern Baptist missionaries in the 15 nations of the former Soviet Union rely on your giving through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (2007 goal: \$165 million), on your praying, and on your strategic partnership with the work.

International Mission Board workers in the former Soviet Union ask for hundreds of new missionaries, thousands of volunteers, and many local churches like yours to work side by side with them in telling the story of Jesus to all the peoples of this region of 11 time zones.

They vitally need your growing financial support through the Lottie Moon offering to continue and expand the work.

Many challenges

The former Soviet Union is a volatile and sometimes chaotic region. Harsh regimes are returning in some nations. Secularism and hollow religious traditions dominate some areas. Islam is making a comeback in other countries. Telling the story of Jesus there won't be easy in the coming days, but has it ever been easy?

At this moment in history, much of the world presents us with the same challenge. Militant Islam and Hinduism, tribal religions, and secular ideologies still rule more than half of all humanity. The global population numbers 6.5 billion and rising. Of the world's

more than 11,000 people groups, more than 6,000 — containing more than 1.65 billion people — remain unreached with the Gospel.

Task unfinished

Southern Baptist missionaries and their partners are seeing amazing breakthroughs. Last year, they ministered for the first time among 1,170 people groups worldwide and engaged more than 100 peoples with a combined population of nearly 100 million. They started more than 23,000 churches and baptized nearly half a million new believers, about 1,300 each and every day.

The Great Commission task is far from finished, and no great task is accomplished without sacrifice. Telling the story of Jesus to the world requires the participation, the passion and the sacrifice of all Southern Baptist believers and churches.

"When I became a Christian, one of my questions was 'Why didn't this happen 20 years earlier?'" one Russian believer admits "but now I thank God for that, because I can understand the man who is suffering. God has a plan, and I'm happy to be in the midst of it!"

What about you? God is moving through the former Soviet Union, and everywhere else in the world. How will you join Him in telling the story of Jesus?

Kazakhstan ripe for enterprise, evangelism

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ALMATY, Kazakhstan (BP) — Much has changed in the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan since Gulia (nor her real name) was featured on The Commission magazine's March 2001 cover.

For starters, both she and her homeland have prospered. Kazakhs discovered oil and Gulia found that her homemade roach repellent, produced as a desperate measure for her family, was a hit in local markets.

Kazakhstan's proven oil reserves of 16 billion barrels, and the possibility of another 60 billion barrels off its Caspian Sea coast, have pumped millions of dollars into the economy. On a smaller scale, Gulia's business has moved from a makeshift effort into a family-wide enterprise with corporate contracts and pending patents.

The nation's newfound wealth launched a wave of materialism, while Gulia's success has allowed her to proclaim Christ in wider circles. "God redeemed my life long before this business became a success," she says. "When I meet with someone new in my business, they learn about my Lord. That's why I live."

Gulia did not make the magazine's cover in 2001 because of an emerging business. She made it because she was part of a young community of Kazakh Christians sold out to Christ, explains Jacob Parson (not his real name) International Mission Board (IMB) strategy associate for teams working in many of Central Asia's former Soviet Union republics.

"In the early 1990s there was just a handful of Kazakh Christians," he says. "Today, there are more than 13,000 Kazakh believers."

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the IMB responded with an urgent focus to channel funds and personnel toward this historic opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. Most Southern Baptist



SHARING GOOD NEWS — Missionary Roman Gopanchuk (seated, right) and Yuri Klochkov (standing) lead a weekly home Bible study group outside the Kazakhstan city of Pavlodar. Christians have found a fertile field for evangelization in the prospering former Soviet republic. (IMB photo)

workers in Kazakhstan refer to a 1991 cultural exchange festival that brought more than 300 evangelicals to Kazakhstan, including many Southern Baptists.

"I can point to this believer or that believer and say they came from those beginnings," Parson says. "A lot of things we started didn't work. Some of the churches started way back are no longer around and some of those first churches are still struggling, but they spawned churches and individuals who are Christian leaders with depth and commitment. It's good to see how far we've come in just 15 years."

"There's so much more to do, yet we, as Southern Baptists, should thank our Lord that He has allowed us to be part of a great expansion of His body. That's worth celebrating. This should just be the beginning. So many cities still have no Christian presence."

Yet evangelical growth in Kazakhstan has slowed. Parson is working with a number of Great Commission Christian (GCC) groups in Kazakhstan to conduct a nationwide church survey.

"The whole GCC community has seen growth level off," he says. "And it is not just among Kazakhs. This plateau is a national issue affecting other people groups in Kazakhstan." Churches in Kazakhstan that work with Russian or Kyrgyz speakers also have seen their growth slow.

Parson counts on the survey to clearly understand this change, but he has his own observations. Oil money flowing into the society is part of the picture. New luxury cars and homes seem to spring up almost weekly.

"Life has sped up here as the nation chases new wealth, and our churches have not escaped this trend," Parson adds. "We've seen

believers deal with moral failure. This happens when some haven't been grounded in character. It's easy for us to think we can pump someone's head with knowledge and it's going to be enough. It never is."

Southern Baptists work with Kazakh Christian leaders for a special focus on developing character.

"When you work life-on-life, it's slower," Parson says. "Nevertheless, we now focus more on discipleship and models of one-on-one teaching. Character within the family matters. When we start seeing heads of households turn to the Lord, we will see whole generations turn to our Lord."

This has proven true for Gulia. When she became a Christian, she was so overwhelmed with joy she began sharing with her whole family, yet they thought she was crazy.

"They told me, 'Jesus is the Russian God.' I said they were wrong. He's not just the Russian God. He's everyone's God. We need to believe in Him."

Over the last 15 years, her four grown children, her mother-in-law and her husband have come to the Lord.

That is business as usual for Gulia as she and her Southern Baptist friends work to see such growth return to Kazakhstan.

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the story of Jesus



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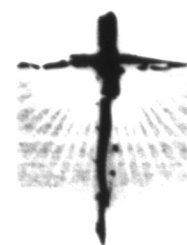
Dec. 2-9, 2007

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National Goal: \$165 million



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MISSISSIPPI
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**THE SECOND
FRONT PAGE**

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

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Looking back

10 years ago

Vice President Al Gore steps up the national dialogue over civil rights protection for homosexuals in a Nov. 10 news conference, saying God creates homosexuals and that God is grieved over their mistreatment.

20 years ago

About 40 Southern Baptist Convention conservative leaders meet in an Atlanta hotel for an all-day "private fellowship meeting" to discuss appropriate responses to widespread political activities of the "moderates" throughout the SBC.

50 years ago

Gordon Sansing, pastor of Broadmoor Church, Jackson, resigns in order to accept the post of Secretary of Department of Cooperative Missions of the State Convention Board, effective Dec. 15.

EXTRAVAGANCE

America is a wealthy nation. There are many different ways to look at how well off we are. Certainly there are people who have less than others and some who have a great deal more than others, but there are many people who fall into the poverty category that are better off than those in the wealthy category in other nations. One of the ways you can gauge how well-to-do Americans are is to look at how they spend money extravagantly for things that are personal activities. For instance, only weeks ago the date on the calendar said October 31 was Halloween. Do you realize that for Halloween, Americans spent almost five billion dollars for candy, costumes, and decorations? Think about it. Halloween has become the second most expensive holiday event in America. It is almost inconceivable and incomprehensible that we would spend that much money to buy tons of candy, which no one needs, on a "holiday" that has no meaning. We are indeed well-to-do people when we can expend so much money on such a worthless event.

What is expended at Halloween, the second largest financial expenditure for a holiday, is nothing to be compared with the number one holiday, which is Christmas. With all of its cards, lights, trees, gifts, and wrappings, Christmas holds

top billing. "Billing" is probably a popular term because most of the bills will be coming due in January and February. How much do we spend? The estimates this year range from 450-500 billion dollars that we will spend on Christmas stuff. It is mind boggling, especially for those of us who recognize that it is to be the celebration of the arrival of God's dear Son who was welcomed in the austere setting of a stable.

We are an extravagant people living in a wealthy nation. While that is the cultural setting of our world, I want to encourage you and, in fact, I want to challenge you to think about being extravagant in giving to the largest missionary endeavor in the history of Christianity. Our Southern Baptist mission force encircles the globe. Maintaining, strengthening, and enlarging our International Missions impact will largely depend on the faithfulness of Southern Baptists giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

for International Missions. The goal this year is 150 million dollars. Your prayers and your giving support are needed.

Why bother even pausing to think about giving to this special offering? I would offer two astounding reasons to you.

We are a blessed people. Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much is also required" (Luke 12:48). A stewardship of God's blessings calls for us to give because we have been given so much.

While we have missionaries in the majority of countries on our globe, there are still hundreds of people groups to which the Gospel has yet to be taken. This past summer, some of our young people from colleges and universities across Mississippi

served as summer missionaries in the Himalaya Mountains. They spent their summer going from one village to another finding pockets of people who were diverse in language, lifestyle, and for the most part disconnected from the rest of the world. No one has arrived to share with most of them the Good News that we have received so freely in Jesus Christ.

These student missionaries worked all summer to locate these folks and there is a plan and a strategy to seek to reach all of these people for Christ. Your offering is a part of that strategy and our gifts will make a difference. Last year Baptists across Mississippi gave \$7,848,576.66 to International Missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. That is a huge amount and an expression not only of our wealth but our hearts. This year let's be even more extravagant in pouring out our love and concern to a world waiting to hear about Jesus.

The author may be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. E-mail: jfutral@mbcb.org.



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

STAFF CHANGES



1. Vermilyea and wife Rachel

1. Corey Vermilyea has been called as pastor of Souenlovie Church, Enterprise. He is pictured with his wife Rachel.

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Evangelization of Moscow at crucial stage

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MOSCOW (BP) — The Metro, Moscow's renowned underground rail network, mirrors the city itself. It is huge, with untold miles of tunnels buried deep in the earth and escalators stretching out of sight.

It's crowded. An estimated nine million people ride daily, from homeless immigrants to high-powered executives. It's elegant and cultured, with chandeliers, marbled mosaics, and works of art adorning more than 150 station platforms.

It's dark. The people you see there seem achingly alone despite the pushing crowds around them. "See their faces?" whispers a missionary riding with a trainload of Muscovites. "See how sad they are? They've got no hope."

The Metro mirrors Moscow, and Moscow mirrors Russia.

Approaching its 860th birthday, the city begun by a medieval warrior prince has been the capital of a vast nation, the stronghold of czars, the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church, the mind of a great culture, the center of Soviet communism.

Ruled by the Mongol Golden Horde and Ivan the Terrible, burned and rebuilt, starved by famine and revolution, "conquered" by Napoleon, besieged by the Nazis, terrorized by Stalin, Moscow has endured.

"We know how to suffer," boast older Muscovites, who pride themselves on their combination of toughness and sophistication.

Communism did its best to destroy that spirit during 70 years of grim, gray conformity. Today, however, Moscow has re-emerged as the gleaming jewel of the "New Russia." It throbs with color, energy, life, and spiritual hunger.

"They have it," a missionary says of that inner hunger, "but they don't realize it."

Red Square on a sunny summer day surges with young hipsters, families out for a stroll, wedding parties, stylishly dressed women, and ragged pensioners scrambling for loose coins. A demonstration by a small band of aging communists mourning the Soviet Union's demise attracts little more than a few curious onlookers.

"We are dying off," one of the communists bitterly complains. "Every year there are fewer of us. The youth don't care about anything. They only live in the present."

Actually, Moscow's new generation does care about some things: getting an education, scrambling for a good job, making money. Moscow is the social and economic dynamo of Russia. An estimated 80% of the nation's

total wealth flows into and out of the city.

Up to 15 million people, more than a tenth of all Russians, live within the four urban "rings" that surround the Kremlin's walls. It is Europe's largest metropolitan area.

At least four million Muscovites are between the ages of 18-40. They include the heart of Russia's educated leadership class. Graduates of the city's 220 colleges and universities compete for the best jobs. The successful enjoy the city's shiny shopping malls and nightclubs. The rest of Moscow's millions hustle to make a living.

Underneath the bright surfaces of the city, however, lies a hard substratum of Russian pain. Six in 10 heads of Moscow households are alcoholic. Many men die too young from drinking and despair. Many children seldom see their fathers. Mothers struggle alone to make ends meet. Dysfunctional families are the rule, not the exception.

Russians are proud of their heritage of great literature, music, and art, but the revolutions, wars, and mass dislocations of the 20th century tore away much of their history and left nothing to replace it.

Nearly all Muscovites are born into the Russian Orthodox Church, but few worship in its ornate, mostly empty sanctuaries.

Longstanding suspicion and hostility persist toward non-Orthodox religious groups including Baptists, who have worshipped in Russia 130 years. Even if they don't practice Orthodoxy, many Russians feel they would be denying their "Russianness" by joining another church.

The novelty of post-Soviet religious freedom has worn off. In heady days of new openness in the 1990s, Muscovites would respond by the thousands to evangelistic campaigns. No more. Now it's a hard, slow effort to make committed disciples of Christ.

That's not necessarily bad, according to missionary Ed Tarleton, a 14-year resident of Moscow.

"There would be a hundred people accept Christ, but a year later you couldn't find them," Tarleton recalls of the early post-Soviet



ORTHODOX FAILURE — A woman lights candles in an Orthodox church in Moscow. The city remains the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church, but few Muscovites worship the risen Christ in Orthodox sanctuaries. Southern Baptist workers see Moscow as key to evangelizing the expansive country. (IMB photo)

days. "It doesn't sound as glamorous, but now if a missionary says to you, 'We've got 10 to 15 people in our Friday night Bible study,' a year later that Bible study is turning into a church."

Mikhail Chekalin, 46-year-old leader of the association of 28 Moscow Baptist churches, understands the enormity of the task. As the grandson of a Baptist pastor shot for his faith under Stalin's reign of terror, Chekalin relishes the new freedoms.

"It's wide open," he says. "We can do evangelism without being reprimanded. We can do it in the streets. We can meet with our brothers and sisters without problems. We can start churches. We can preach like our fathers could not. People are searching for Christ and we must search for them."

How do you find them in a sea of 15 million? "We have 28 churches, and that is small," Chekalin admits, "but there are people in these churches God is preparing to do evangelism and start churches. God has given us the inspiration and desire for this to happen."

It's an impossible task without God. Reaching Moscow "is going to take an outpouring of God's Spirit," Brad Stamey says.

"That's what we need to pray for: an outpouring into the hearts and minds of people that gives them a hunger for spiritual truth, that makes them seekers. As the Scripture says, he who seeks will find."

Bibliocipher

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PWOHN EWN NCJHDA
WA NWRWLLWQ; AWL
NCWK VEWQUHN EWN
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AWLNC.

GLWIULPH NQUENJ-

HUIUE: WEU

Clue: P = B

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Psalm Sixty-Nine: Five.

CLASSIFIED ADS

MS POSITIONS

SEEKING FULL-TIME PASTOR. FBC Shannon, Lee County, MS. Send resume to FBC, pastor search committee, P. O. Box 21, Shannon, MS 38868.

HARRISVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH, Simpson Association, seeking a full-time minister of youth/activities director. Resumes should be sent to Harrisville Baptist Church, attn: search committee, P. O. Box 308, Harrisville, MS 39082.

FBC, LAKE, MISS., IS SEEKING FULL-TIME minister of youth. Please send resumes to FBC, P. O. Box 157, Lake, MS 39092.

SEEKING PART-TIME MINISTER OF Students. Those interested in this position or the interim position should contact Pineview Baptist Church, Clinton, MS. Phone 601-924-7677.

Fax resumes to (601) 924-8378, email pineviewbc@bellsouth.net.

COUNTY LINE BAPTIST CHURCH, Crystal Springs, 20 miles South of Jackson, is looking for an individual interested in leading music service involving praise band & choir. Please send resume to Attn: music search committee, P.O. Box 578, Crystal Springs, MS 39059.

TRADITIONAL, GROWING SOUTHERN Baptist church near Memphis, seeking full-time student minister. Must be spiritually mature and self-motivated. Requires good communication skills, creativity, flexibility, and the ability to work well with others. Send resume to Personnel committee, 50 N. Parkway Street, Hernando, MS 38632 or email to bailey_pbc@yahoo.com.

SEEKING FULL-TIME ASSOC. PASTOR/ ed. director with passion for S.S. Send resumes to Vicki Brantly at vnbrantly@hotmail.com, or East Side Baptist Church, 718 E. 9th Street, Mountain Home, AR 72653.

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MINISTER OF STUDENTS: Southside Baptist Church in Andalusia, Alabama is accepting resumes for the full-time

position of Minister of Students. This position is responsible for the College, High School, and Middle School students. Please send resumes to Minister of Students Search Committee, c/o, Mike Blocker, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, Alabama 36420.

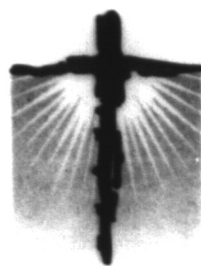
CRAWFORD BAPTIST CHURCH, MOBILE, Alabama; seeking a senior pastor who is an experienced leader with 5 years of ministry experience, possesses college & seminary degrees, has strong leadership skills, skilled in expository preaching style and a strong supporter of the Baptist Faith and message. Send resumes to Benny Johnston, 4500 Harvest Blvd., Semmes, Alabama 36575, email Bjohns7467@aol.com.

FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR of worship and youth needed at Little Escambia Baptist Church. Desiring a blended service, with choir(s) and aggressive youth leadership. Education and experience desired. Send resume to P.O. Box 291, Flomation, AL, or email littleescambia@earthlink.net.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Fall Festival, Oak Grove Church, Meridian



MISSISSIPPI BAPTISTS



2. Girls in Action, Evergreen Church, Louisville



3. Mexico missionary speaks at Evergreen Church, Louisville



4. RAs and GAs, First Church, Glendale

1. A Talent Showcase was held as part of the Fall Festival at Oak Grove Church, Meridian. Pictured are participants.

2. Girls in Action of Evergreen Church, Louisville, attended a day camp at Chester Church, Ackerman, when they learned about other countries and brought items to send to the Ukraine for Bible schools and mission projects. Shown are the participants with two of the coordinators for Missions Madness.

3. The Acteens and Woman's Missionary Union of Evergreen Church, Louisville, welcomed Mary Mitchell, a missionary from Mexico who gave a presentation of her experiences on the mission field.

4. First Church, Glendale, GAs and RAs participated in a Walk-A-Thon to raise money for World Hunger. Shown are the participants.

5. Crystal Springs Church, Tylertown, ordained Randall Pigott as deacon Oct. 28. Shown are pastor Danny Stevens, Pigott, and Rhonda Pigott.

6. West Ripley Church, Ripley, recently ordained three deacons, including Ben Reaves, the youngest deacon ever ordained at the church. He is shown with three generations of family who are also deacons; shown are pastor Randy P. Latch, Victor Reaves, grandfather, Chris Reaves, father, and Reaves.

7. Bradford Chapel, Calhoun Association, recently gave 114 Christmas shoeboxes to Samaritan's Purse, exceeding their goal by 29 boxes. Shown are several of the participants. Francheska James, director, is in center.

8. Main Street Church, Hattiesburg, hosted a Fall Family Festival Oct. 31. Shown are some of the participants.



5. Deacon Ordination, Crystal Springs Church, Tylertown



6. Deacons ordained, West Ripley Church, Ripley



7. Shoebox Collection, Bradford Chapel, Calhoun Association



8. Fall Family Festival, Main Street Church, Hattiesburg

JUST FOR THE RECORD



9. Gorman licensed to ministry, Leflore Church, Holcomb



10. Robertson and Lipe, Clear Creek Church, Oxford

9. Nathan Gorman was licensed to the ministry by Leflore Church, Holcomb, Oct. 14. Shown are Gorman, Beckie Gorman, and pastor Larry Livingston.

10. Clear Creek Church, Oxford, recently received a certificate signifying the church was the top per capita giving church in Lafayette Association for the 2006 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Shown are wMu director Peggie Robertson receiving the award from pastor Charles Lipe.

11. Mt. Olive Church, Baldwin, is presenting The Christmas Offering Dec. 8 & 9. For information, call (662) 841-0701.

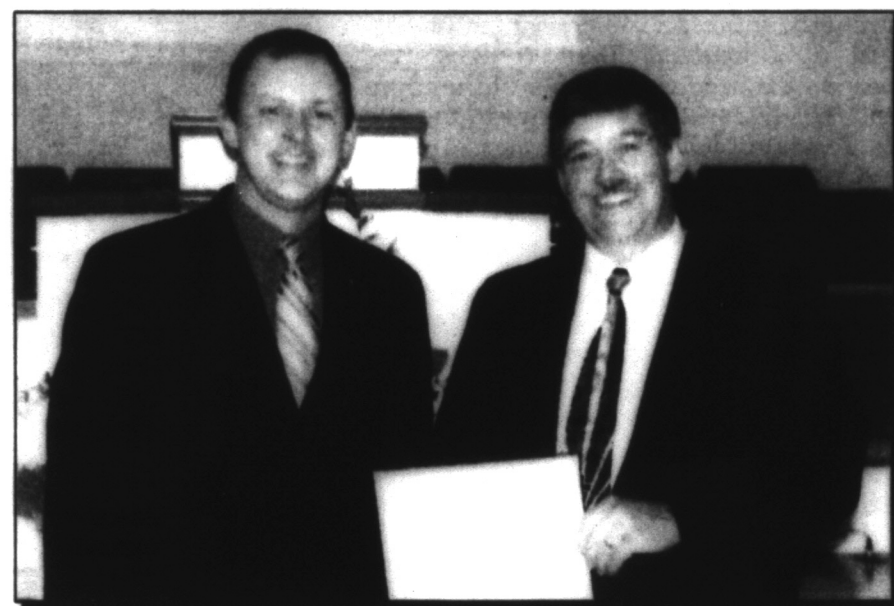
12. Monticello Church, Monticello, is presenting Jesus, There's Just Something About That Name Dec. 8 & 9, with a mass choir of 200 made up of singers from several local churches. For more information, call (601) 587-2114.

13. Olyn F. Roberts, missions coordinator for Winston Association, needs 25 more men to participate in a mission trip to Anchorage, Alaska, for several dates in June. Total price \$1225. For more information, contact Roberts at (662) 773-5968, 803-0112, or write Roberts @ 3960 Hwy. 15 North, Louisville, MS 39339.

14. Shiloh Church, Carroll Association, recently honored Doug Warren on his 20th anniversary as bivocational pastor of Shiloh Church, Carroll Association. The recognition included surprise attendance by relatives, testimonies, special music, and a fellowship meal. The



15. Deacon ordinations, Shiloh Church, Houlika



16. Morgan licensed to ministry, Dumas Church, Dumas

church presented him with a new computer and a pictorial scrapbook.

Andy Freeman, Todd shields, and Gerald Holder.

15. Shiloh Church, Houlika, ordained new deacons on August 19. Pictured are Joe Herndon, pastor, with

16. Dumas Church, Dumas, licensed DeWayne Morgan to the ministry Nov. 11. Shown are pastor Scott Hudson and Morgan.

HOMECOMINGS & REVIVALS

Philadelphia Church, Etta; 160th birthday; Dec. 2, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Larry West, guest speaker. Dinner in Fellowship Hall followed by special presentation of church's history. For more information, call (662) 266-1265. E-mail: bobby.irvin@earthlink.net.

COLLEGE NEWS

1. Blue Mountain College (BMC) will present Christmas on the Hill, a program of season music by the BMC Chorale, on Nov. 29 at 7:30 p.m. in Garrett Hall auditorium on the Blue Mountain campus. For more information, call (662) 685-4771.

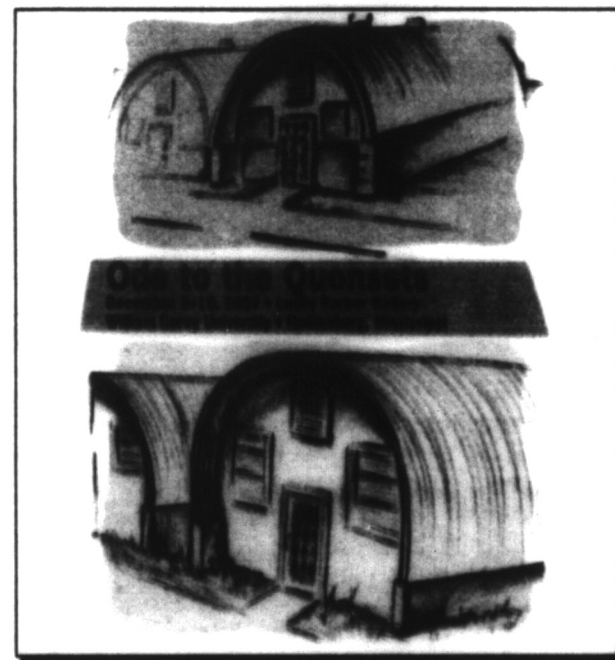
2. William Carey University will celebrate the Christmas season with Christmas Vespers on Dec. 16 at 7:30 p.m., and Keyboards at Christmas on Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. Both events will be held in Smith Auditorium of the Thomas Fine Arts Center on the Hattiesburg campus. Admission is free. For more information, call (601) 318-6175.

3. Garry Breland is the new academic vice-president at William Carey University (WCU). He replaces Cloyd Ezell, who served for ten years before returning to full-time teaching in the math department. Breland, a WCU alum along with his wife Mary Beth, served Hannibal-LaGrange College in Missouri for 23 years, the last nine as vice-president for academic affairs. He holds master of divinity and doctor of education degrees from New Orleans Seminary.

4. The annual Bobby Halford Holiday Baseball Camp and Showcase for youth age seven to 17 will be held Dec. 27-29 on the William Carey University campus in Hattiesburg. For more information, call (601) 318-6110. E-mail: bhalford@wmcarey.edu.

5. Daniel Edney, a Vicksburg physician and Christian radio talk show host, will speak at the second Christian Leadership lecture at William Carey University in Hattiesburg on Dec. 3 at 9:30 a.m. in Smith Auditorium. Edney will speak on leadership in the health care field. Admission is free. For more information, call (601) 318-6192.

6. William Carey University will host Ode to Quonsets, an exhibit featuring ceramics, sculpture, drawings, and paintings of art students at the school's Gulf Coast campus, on December 5-19 in the Lucille Parker Gallery on the Hattiesburg campus. An opening reception will be held Dec. 5 from 4:30-5:30 p.m. For more information, call (601) 318-6192.



6. Ode to the Quonsets Exhibit, WCU

Missionaries seek to turn Central Asia focus to Christ

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec. 2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

CENTRAL ASIA (BP) — Chalk races across a blackboard as Anne-Marie Bennett (not her real name) struggles to keep pace with her students.

The names are coming quickly now: Napoleon, Washington, Stalin. She has asked her class to list the world's greatest leaders and they have plenty of suggestions, but the 37-year-old Southern Baptist worker's next question is more telling.

"Between wealth, intelligence, strength, and love, which is most important in a leader?" Bennett asks. She assigns a trait to each corner of the room and tells her students to move to the one they would pick.

Once the shuffle is finished, only the "love" corner remains empty.

The exercise is part of the morality-based curriculum Bennett uses to teach English and share Jesus with university students in the former Soviet Union. It's also a clue to the overwhelming lostness that consumes the Central Asian nation where she ministers.

Fewer than two percent of Bennett's people group identify themselves as evangelical Christians. Most are Muslim, though decades of communist rule ground their Islamic faith to a thin veneer.

"They're Muslim because they're told they're Muslim," says Tom Sterling (not his real name), a Southern Baptist worker who serves with Bennett. "Most haven't read the Quran, but they'll tell you that's what they believe in."

Above Allah, many in this post-Soviet nation worship affluence. Here, what you have is more important than what you believe. From designer clothes to high-rise apartments, looking good and living well matters.

Indeed, it's the prospect of bigger paychecks that attracts many of Bennett's students. Elshad (not his real name), age 17, is one of them. Clean-cut and energetic, the college freshman studies toward a career in the country's lucrative oil industry. Bennett says fluent English skills instantly can propel students like Elshad into the upper-middle class.

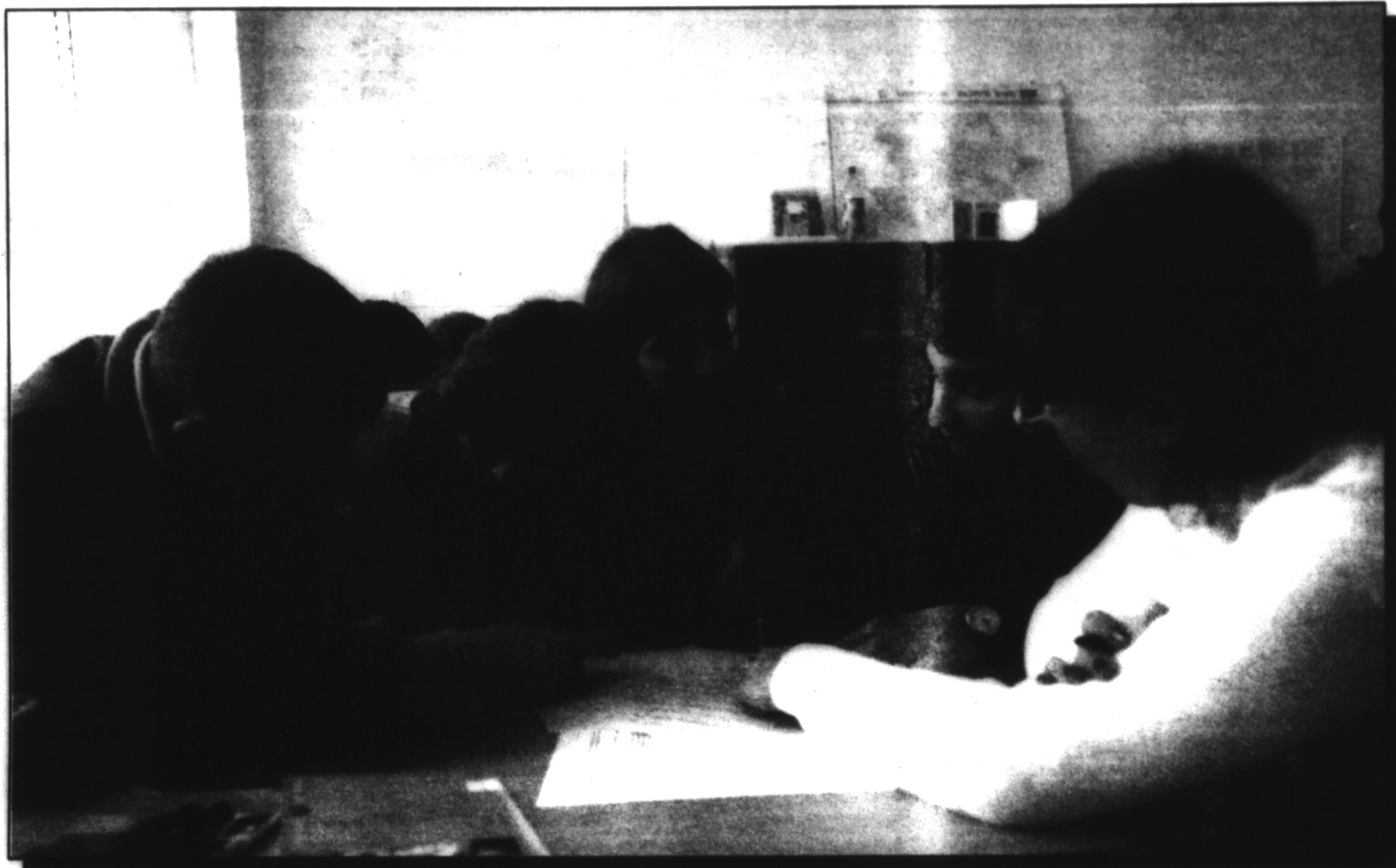
With materialism also comes corruption. Students sometimes bribe professors for passing grades; police extort money from those they are supposed to protect. Other problems abound, too. War forced many from their homes, leaving thousands displaced.

Others wrestle with dubious job security following the Soviet Union's demise in the early 1990s. Unborn babies are routinely aborted as a substitute for birth control.

"There's just a sadness," Bennett says, "and if there's not a sadness, there's a hardness. People grasp for anything they can reach and if [Christians] are not here to stand in the gap, what are they reaching for?"

She prays the answer will be Christ. Bennett's goal is to see new churches spring up across the country, starting with her students, but it can't happen without the chance to share the Gospel and Bennett uses English as a tool to create that opportunity.

She's dubbed her classes "conversation clubs" for a reason. There's no men-



TRYING HARD — Students collaborate on an in-class assignment involving new vocabulary words. Although Anne-Marie Bennett's (not her real name) English classes don't count for university credit, students come because good English skills translate into better paying jobs. (IMB photo)

tion of dangling participles or diagramming sentences. Instead, students simply do a lot of talking. The idea is to practice and polish conversational English, building on language basics learned in earlier grades.

A morality-based curriculum helps Bennett steer classroom conversations, and ultimately students' thoughts, toward values and ethics, even faith.

The conversations don't end when the bell rings. Bennett's ministry depends on opportunities to build relationships by interacting with students outside the classroom. Class field trips are regular events and guarantee time for Bennett to share her faith.

"You're going to have a faith-based discussion," Bennett says of conversation with her students outside class. "You're going to talk about Christ."

No matter how deeply a spiritual conversation may delve, these kinds of witnessing opportunities aren't silver bullets. Most of the students Bennett has helped lead to the Lord accepted Jesus only after repeated exposure to the Gospel.

Her own salvation experience enables Bennett to empathize with students' issues with Christianity. Raised in a nonbelieving family, Bennett gave her life to Christ in college thanks to a friend who frequently invited her to church. Bennett says it's amazing how the Lord ordered her steps to give her common ground with the people He has called her to serve.

Despite such blessings, Bennett's ministry isn't a string of success stories. She also has endured bitter disappointment while serving in this former Soviet Union nation.

Four years ago, Bennett remembers standing on a beach as two of her students were dipped beneath the frigid waters of the Caspian Sea. Their bap-

tisms were among the first fruits of a newborn church Bennett helped start in her home. Afterward, the band of believers held their first Lord's Supper.

"When everyone left that evening, God's peace rested on my house," she remembers, "and it was so beautiful and marvelous... but that was then."

Soon the small church-start began to fizzle. Within two years the fledgling congregation finally collapsed.

"Everything I had seen, understood and been a part of was basically falling apart," she relates. "It caused me to wonder about God — not that He wasn't sovereign, not that He couldn't or wouldn't work through this, but to wonder what He was about to do."

In that moment of despair, Bennett says the Lord threw her a life preserver from Scripture, Isaiah 43:18-19a: "Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing..." The verses gave Bennett courage to move on and learn from her mistakes.

"You can't shortcut the system for seeing fruit," she says. "I made a greenhouse and wanted to see something grow quickly, and it did. But you can't keep the plant in the greenhouse forever... One day it has to come out."

Bennett adds she made a conscious decision to step back from the church as it crumbled, knowing it needed to thrive, or die, on its own.

"I could have come in with Elmer's glue and bandages and repaired it, and it would still be limping along," she says. "If they want to gather again, they have the tools, understanding and discipleship behind them to do that. Perhaps one day they will... I have hope for that [church reorganizing]."

Bennett is not allowing past failures to diminish her passion for seeing stu-

dents come to Christ. She is busy rebuilding her ministry. She says God has already blessed her with a core group of students with whom she's forged solid relationships.

"I'm praying for a few people who will say, 'We want to be discipled,'" she says. "I love working with students; I love sharing Jesus with them. I love planting those seeds and watching them grow."



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WEEK OF PRAYER FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL MISSION STUDY

Dec. 2-9, 2007

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING*
National Goal: \$165 million



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Russia missionaries inspired, despite slow acceptance

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec. 2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

IVANOVO, Russia (BP) — Southern Baptist missionary Mel Skinner keeps an empty whiskey bottle somewhere in his family's apartment in central Russia.

In the fall of 1999, local women at a restaurant gave whiskey and chocolate to Skinner and his family as a gift to welcome them to Ivanovo. At the time, the Skinners had just moved from Moscow, where they had been church planters for several years. Though he later dumped out the whiskey, he still tears up at the memory of the gift.

"They came up to the table and said, 'Excuse me for interrupting your meal,'" he remembers. "We just wanted to say thank you for coming to our café. We noticed that our day was better after you've been into our café than it was before you came in." God used all that to just confirm to us this is the place He wanted us to be."

Since 1992, Skinner and his wife Nancy, who have two children (Sarah, age 16, and Anna, age 13) have lived and ministered among the people of Russia. They've lived there longer than any other International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries since the fall of communism. Though they have struggled to make the impact they had hoped for, they haven't wavered in their call to the country.

Skinner has been offered other missionary jobs throughout the region, but he believes he is called to reach Russia by starting churches. The Skinners transferred in August from Ivanovo, near Moscow, to St. Petersburg in the north.

"Our second term, I was that strategy coordinator guy over a large area," he says, "and that was just enough for me to realize God hasn't put me together to do that [type of work]. All I want to do is impact a population or a people, a city."

Skinner helped start a church in Ivanovo that averages 150-200 people each Sunday. Out of that group a smaller church group started. Since then, Skinner began Bible studies in other parts of the city, hoping to start more churches. Now he will take that same strategic approach to planting churches in St. Petersburg.

Reception to the Gospel in the cities can be as frigid as a typical Russian day in January, but in the middle of a welcomed Russian summer — with temperatures usually in the 70s to low 80s and the sun shining until after 10 p.m. — Skinner brushes off any thoughts about the harsh winters or the struggles to spread the Gospel.

His wife, however, remembers dark times when they first moved to Russia. Nancy struggled with depression and the desire to pack up everything and go back to the United States.

"Only God's grace keeps me here," she says. "It's His gracious hand upon us, because there have been times it would have been so easy to leave. Somehow God always got us through that. He's faithful, and His grace is very sufficient."

She keeps a piece of cardboard folded in half that rests on a shelf in the living room. It is a note from her daughter. On one side is, "I love you Mommy." On the other side is, "Be happy all the time."

"The first thing in my thoughts when I get up is to thank the Lord for a new day... regardless of how it is outside," she says. "There is true joy in the Lord."

Skinner and local missionaries visit areas of Russian cities where they hope to start Bible studies. Skinner, a self-proclaimed introvert, appears to have a natural gift for sharing his faith as crowds of young people gather around him at an apartment complex.

A couple of boys quickly dismiss his efforts and walk away, but the rest crowd around him. They seem to listen intently as Skinner shares the Gospel in their Russian language. After finishing his presentation, a few in the group ask Skinner for an autograph since he is the first American they have met.

No one seems all that interested in the message. Unfazed by the response, Skinner moves to another area of the complex.



ON THE FIELD — International Mission Board missionaries Mel (second from right) and Nancy Skinner (right) were appointed career missionaries to Russia with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. For 15 years, they have served among a post-Soviet people first in Moscow and then in Ivanovo. Today the Skinners live and work in St. Petersburg, Russia. (IMB photo)

"Somebody once talked about the number of times somebody needs to hear the Gospel to be saved, to make that rational decision to trust your life to Christ," Skinner says. "I don't know what that number is but most of these people have never had any kind of Gospel access."

Many cling to the Russian Orthodox Church, which Skinner and local believers contend is more about tradition and obligation than true faith.

"Russia is an Orthodox country, but ask them what it means to be Orthodox and they don't have an answer," says a local believer who accepted Christ after developing a friendship with Skinner.

"Why go to the church and light a candle when no one can tell you why they light a candle?" he asks. "They light a candle, go get drunk and don't remember lighting the candle."

Rumors about Baptists and any other group besides Russian Orthodox often circulate in Russia. Baptists are seen as a cult, Skinner says. Some believe Baptists kill and eat their young.

"Generally, I laugh," Skinner says. "I basically say, 'You know if that were true, they would have closed all the Baptist churches. They would have thrown all Baptist people in prison... or executed them.' Generally, when [people in Russia] hear the truth, they know the truth."

Whether through walking their dog or running errands, the Skinners make friends and have seen signs of spiritual growth. One friend credits the Skinners with helping her get through a difficult, lonely time.

"I had no friends, no one," says a missionary from a neighboring country. She describes her friendship with the Skinners as a "miracle."

"God made a difference in my life through them. They taught me God loves me despite my disobedience."

Skinner is optimistic great things will happen in Russia's cities — he just doesn't know when.

"What I want is for [God] to be honored and glorified in my life," he says. "That's all I want. It's really not about us. It's about God and His glory for eternity."

Seeds of salvation planted among Russians living in Ivanovo

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec. 2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

IVANOVO, Russia (BP) — It started out as a typical lesson for Peter (not his real name). Then he asked his new student why he wanted to take guitar.

The response was unlike any Peter had heard. Mel Skinner told him he had no desire to play the guitar in public. He just wanted to be able to worship God.

"It kind of caught him off guard, I guess," says the Southern Baptist missionary, "but over the course of several months, [Peter] began understanding me... and it got to where less and

less of our time was spent practicing the guitar, and more and more in talking about spiritual things."

Skinner studied with Peter for more than a year, with each lesson turning to spiritual matters. Eventually, Skinner stopped taking lessons but continued meeting with Peter to discuss his faith.

Three years after that first meeting, Peter and his fiancé accepted Christ into their lives. Peter's story is one of the bright spots in Skinner's challenging ministry in Ivanovo.

"I knew God was a real person, and [faith in Him] was something for me," Peter says. "My time had arrived. God wanted it and it was so."

Today, Peter looks for opportunities to share his faith with friends. "I believe there is a place for God inside every person," he adds. "Sooner or later some of them will come to God."



HERE TO WORSHIP — Although the work in Ivanovo, Russia, is slow, believers at Resurrection Baptist Church there gather each week for worship and prayer. (IMB photo)

Poverty, persecution scar Turkmenistan evangelization

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan (BP) — For Josh Russell (not his real name), training church planters is a lot like roasting coffee.

Inside a narrow storefront in Central Asia, the Southern Baptist worker details the art of transforming green coffee beans into steaming cups of java. He grins mischievously as he remembers the first time he roasted — and nearly burned — an eight-pound batch of Mexican coffee beans.

"It was so dark. It was too done," he says. "The problem we had was how to know when to pull it out... The same thing happens as we're training and equipping leaders. When do you turn them loose? Are you waiting so long they're not fit for the needed purpose because you've skewed their thinking?"

It's a dilemma Russell continues to wrestle with in his role as strategy coordinator for Turkmenistan's Turkmen people. He's charged with sharing Christ and planting churches across a nation cut off from the Gospel by more than 65 years of communist rule under the harsh boot of the Soviet empire.

If that task doesn't sound hard enough, there's an extra hurdle Russell has to jump: he doesn't live in Turkmenistan. He makes his home miles away in another country.

Russell is a nonresidential worker, which means he's not able to live among the people he is trying to evangelize. It's not a decision he made by choice. Russell served in post-Soviet Turkmenistan almost five years before being forced to leave. Though the move has made day-to-day ministry more difficult, it hasn't diminished his passion for reaching the lost.

"What I do is help cast vision," Russell says of his role. "We have to help Turkmen understand they need

to love their own people; they need to take the Gospel to their own people."

To make that vision a reality, Russell focuses his ministry on cultivating and maturing leaders within the Turkmen church. The goal has evolved into a number of unique projects, ranging from wholesale coffee distribution to a new leadership training facility.

Despite their differences, each project is designed around a common purpose: meeting Turkmenistan's overwhelming need for Christ. Less than two percent of Turkmenistan's five million Turkmen profess faith in Jesus. Here, Muslims represent the majority, though many claim Islamic faith in name only.

"The Soviets destroyed Islam within Turkmenistan," Russell says. "I consider most of the people to be atheists or secularists... I've met few who pray or go to the mosque on Fridays."

Instead of Islam, Russell points to poverty as a key factor in lostness among his people group. "Most Turkmen live in such difficult situations that they're not even thinking about their spiritual need," he says. "They're so consumed day-to-day just getting enough food to eat, meeting the needs of life... They're blind to the fact they are alienated from God."

Poverty isn't the Gospel's only enemy. Across Turkmenistan, churches are under attack. Believers are placed under surveillance or house arrest. Others are beaten or tortured. Persecution has caused some to flee the country, while others have recanted their faith.

Pastors are frequent targets. "One [pastor] was beaten so badly he lost hearing in one ear," Russell says. "His head also was held underwater to the point he almost drowned, multiple times."

Though some churches have weathered such attacks, not all are as steadfast. Last year, a 60-member con-



NATIONAL CELEBRATION — Officials march around Ashgabat Olympic Stadium as the crowd cheers in celebration of Turkmenistan's Neutrality Day, the second most important holiday in the country after Independence Day. Neutrality Day marks Turkmenistan's official declaration of international neutrality in 1995. (IMB photo)

gregation was scattered after its pastor was forced to leave Turkmenistan.

Russell says setbacks like this underscore the need to cultivate new leaders within the church. He believes teaching believers how to endure, even thrive, under severe persecution is instrumental to a church-planting movement (CPM) among the Turkmen.

"Fear prevents them from seeing a CPM," he says. "The world they live in is opposed to them changing, and they need to be prepared for that."

Rashid (not his real name) wasn't prepared. The 31-year-old Turkmen was a college student when KGB agents stormed his small church in Ashgabat, taking the names of everyone gathered there to worship.

On another occasion, he was arrested and interrogated. Agents told Rashid he was "dangerous" because he was a Christian. After hours of browbeating, he was finally released even though he wouldn't recant his Christian faith.

Leadership training events are one tool Russell uses to combat faith-shaking experiences like Rashid's. Scheduled throughout the year, groups of six to eight Turkmen are flown to a neighboring country for a week of intense discipleship.

Training sessions include evangelism, church-planting strategy, Bible study, and plenty of discussion. Russell also puts classroom lessons into practice, sending participants out into city streets to witness.

Since his KGB experience, Rashid has attended several leadership events. He believes training is a turning point for the Turkmen church because it's a source of unity and encouragement.

"We brought [back] with us new leaders," he says of the training. "They were strong, confident, and I saw the difference they made in their local churches."

Personally, Rashid says the training taught him to disciple others — a skill critical in his role as pastor of a church in his hometown.

Such successes led Russell to establish a leadership resource center. Funded by the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, he plans to use it as a hub for future training events. In addition to a classroom, library and office, the center is equipped with a bedroom and kitchen, which allows Russell to house participants in the training events.

Russell says there's more to building strong leaders than training. That's why he's recently opened a wholesale coffee business in the city where he lives. The business sets an example for Turkmen churches: Sharing Jesus can mean a job.

Besides providing believers with finances to engage in outreach, Russell's business also opens doors that otherwise may be closed.

As a wholesaler, Russell's local distributors form the business's front-line, pulling double-duty as both salesmen and evangelistic church planters. The job requires a passion for sharing Christ and a knack for building relationships.

The business-based missions model is working so well Russell has received requests to export it elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. He's taken steps toward opening a coffee shop in Turkmenistan this year.

"We let them know up front we're followers of Jesus," he says. "We make it clear we're unique because we're believers. Discipleship can't just happen in a classroom. It happens because you're watching me live. I'm watching you live. And we're learning as we go."

Above all, Russell is excited about the future of the Turkmen church. In spite of obstacles like poverty and persecution, there's real evidence the Gospel is making progress.

"I see steady, gradual growth within the church, new churches established each year and faithful evangelism taking place," he says. "We've got leaders who are starting to have a vision, taking initiative to go out and start new churches in areas they know the Gospel hasn't penetrated yet."



BARELY GETTING BY — Sheep-skin hats, a staple for many men in Turkmenistan, are sold in a massive open-air bazaar near Ashgabat. Poverty is one of the primary barriers to the Gospel for many of the country's five million people who live under the domination of one legally-recognized political party. (IMB photo)

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Recognizing the Savior

Isaiah 53:1-12

By Andy Vaughn

The period of time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is often described as the busiest holiday season of the year. In the midst of the many different priority shifts that take place during the holiday season, the challenge that stares everyone face to face is that of keeping Jesus Christ as their main priority.

The book of Isaiah was written during the eighth century B.C. by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah's writing served as encouragement for the Jewish people that would be held captive during the Babylonian exile. The captured exiles were hauled away from their homeland and were in desperate need of encouragement in their foreign surroundings. Encouragement

came to the exiles in the fact that God would bear Himself before the nations that all would see His salvation. God alone is able to provide salvation as described in Scripture.

God's word states in Isaiah 52:13 (NASB), "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted." Isaiah 52:13-15 serve as the first stanza of a five stanza prophecy about the "Servant" — God's Messiah. God's promise of salvation through the Messiah was proclaimed to a people that needed physical deliverance from their surroundings, but also to a people that needed to hear of salvation through the Messiah. In our contemporary society we too have a need of physical



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deliverance, and an even greater need to recognize the spiritual deliverance available through Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:2 (NASB) states, "For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him." God sent Jesus Christ, the Savior, as a man that could completely identify with all people. The Messiah was sent to the world in the form as described in Isaiah 53:2 so that He would not be marveled at due to His physical appearance, but that people would bow down before Him as God in the flesh.

Isaiah 53:3 describes the Servant, Savior, as one that was forsaken and despised by men. In no form or fashion was the Messiah deformed, ugly, or out of the ordinary. The Savior came for the people and as they

placed their own expectations on Him, they rejected Him. How often do we put our personal expectations on Jesus and He does not meet them. The challenge for us during the holidays is to set our expectations aside and allow Jesus Christ the Savior to fulfill His promise of salvation to the world.

"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." Isaiah 53:5 NASB. The sin of man fell upon the Messiah as God's way of salvation was provided to the world. All too often the priority of man focuses on what we can do for self. God demonstrates to man that He is the Way of salvation.

According to verse 6, "The iniquity of us all has fallen on Him". In order to fully recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world, it is of utmost importance to understand that He is available as the Savior of all who will come to Him.

Verse 9 describes the Savior as "having no deceit in His mouth." The Savior is not only God in the flesh, but He is also without fault. Verse 10 describes the Savior as "being put to grief and rendered Himself as a guilt offering." Jesus offered Himself up as the guilt offering sinful man is in desperate need of.

Verse 12 states, "He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." As Christ bore the sin of many He did not actively commit sin, but He provided the way for sinners to be right with God.

Yes, you can be sure that Jesus is the Messiah God sent to save us. Those who look to the Savior by turning from their sins and trusting in Jesus as their Savior will be saved. God provided the way as seen in these verses of Isaiah, it is up to people to decide if He will be their priority in life.

Vaughn is pastor of First Church, Fulton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Affirm God's Good Plan

Genesis 1:1, 26-28,31; 2:15-18, 21-25

By Mellen Moore

Fall is in the air. It is a cool crisp morning, the wind is a little nippy and the rustling of leaves fill the air. The beautiful colored leaves on the trees glisten in harmony with nature. I am reminded of the poem by Joyce Kilmer entitled "Trees." Each day the tree looks up to God with arms raised as if to pray. In the summer, robins nest in its hair and rain falls upon its bosom. The last line of the poem so aptly states that "only God can make a tree." God's good plan began with His creation.

"In the beginning God" (Genesis 1:1 KJV), He was in existence before all things. The fact of creation by God is affirmed in Hebrews 11:3a (KJV) that through faith the worlds were framed by God's

Word. The key is our faith — accept, trust and believe. John 1:1 gives further affirmation, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (KJV). God spoke the creation into existence and spoke through the creation of His existence.

The thought is awesome. God, our Father, creator of heavens and earth created man in His image. We are a reflection of Him, of His glory and His love. His love overflowed as the Spirit of God hovered over earth. The Trinity, God the father (Genesis 1:1 KJV), Jesus Christ his son (Colossians 1:16 KJV), and the Holy Spirit (Psalms 104:30 KJV) were active in creation. The completeness of God completed the creation with man, the crowning glory of His creation.



Moore

Next comes the blessing to live in God's perfect creation and the command to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28 KJV). Clearly, God's plan included man's authority over all liv-

ing creatures. God's good plan gave man everything he needed in his environment and God declared that it was good.

God placed man that He had formed out of dust of the ground in the Garden of Eden. How unique? Man experienced an intimate personal relationship with God even to the very breath of life. The Garden of Eden was perfect — the ideal environment of God's blessing and prosperity. The very word "Eden" means delight or treasure. The idea of a garden suggests beauty and bounty, happiness and fruitfulness. For any of us who have ever had a garden, we know the beauty and bounty part come as a result of work. God intended for man to

work "... dress it and keep it" (Genesis 2: 15 KJV), to be the caretaker, gardener, or farmer. Take any choice of names, all of which qualify as a worker. The responsibility was not a one time event but a continuous one. The unique person of man was placed in a unique garden of perfect delight and he was expected to keep it that way.

The unique garden was more than man's home; it was the home of a command from God that man may eat freely of every tree of the garden. With this permission, the command met man's nutritional needs. God also gave a prohibitive command to withhold eating of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17 KJV). Man already had everything he needed including the tree of life. The choice to disobey held consequences "thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17 KJV). Man's uniqueness as created by God could bring true happiness and contentment by conscious obedience.

God recognized man's need for a companion, called a "help meet" (Genesis 2:18 KJV). God

chose to create Adam's companion from Adam by taking a rib from his side for the foundation of woman. Thus, Adam's statement "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2: 23 KJV) giving her the descriptive name woman. God brought her to man as a desirable "help meet." The words leave and cleave paint God's ideal picture of marriage as man leaves his parents for life with his wife. Man and woman, male and female exemplify the beautiful union of marriage created by God. The two began as "one" in a physical sense with woman being made from man and are now joined as "one" described scripturally as "they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 KJV). Man and wife were clothed in their nakedness before God unashamed. This marriage, Adam and woman, could certainly be described as made in heaven and housed in God's garden — God's good plan.

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will

be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be

clear, sharp, and well-lighted. **Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.**

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

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THE BAPTIST
Record

'Soft' ethnic cleansing claiming big toll in Krasnodar

Editor's note: This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions (Dec. 2-9) focuses on missionaries who serve in the former Soviet Union as well as churches partnering with them, exemplifying the global outreach supported by Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

KRASNODAR, Russia (BP) — Not everyone in Krasnodar, Russia, celebrated last September's return of Catherine the Great to this Northern Caucasus city.

To be sure, most people in the city center enjoyed themselves as local officials unveiled the nearly 40-foot monument.

The ceremony lauded Catherine the Great's generosity to the Cossacks in the 18th century when she presented the city of Krasnodar to them for their loyal service to the czars.

Cossack men paraded in old uniforms from a bygone era. Most men wore heavy full-length coats trimmed in gold and red, along with baggy trousers stuffed into tall black leather boots. Perspiration trailed down cheeks and necks of most of the Cossacks from underneath their wide fur hats.

Speeches, Orthodox blessings, and festive songs celebrated the welcomed reversal of a communist decision during Soviet times to destroy the statue, which was then seen as a commemoration of the deposed monarchy.

All that is behind them now and the glory of the Cossacks, who fought for czars as a Russian militia, is back in fashion and power. Yet, this revival has not been good for everyone in the community.

This area, known as the Krasnodar Krai, has also been the home for thousands of Muslims from a small people



REFUGEES AT HOME — Their bags are packed, their home is mostly empty. "Soft" ethnic cleansing by hostile Russian groups rendered this family and many other Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Krai refugees in their own country. More than 10,000 have emigrated from Russia to the United States, where Southern Baptists have an opportunity to reach out to them. (IMB photo)

group known as the Meskhetian Turks. Russian nationalist groups spearheaded by the Cossacks in the area have sustained a low-level campaign of persecution against the Meskhetian Turks.

In a 2005 Washington Post article, Alexander Ossipov, an analyst at the Institute for Humanities and Political Studies in Moscow, called the Cossacks' activities "soft ethnic cleansing."

"The local authorities decided which ethnic groups were desirable and which were not. It's government based on a racist ideology," he said in the article.

The plight of the

Meskhetian Turks in the Krasnodar Krai drew attention from U.S. officials in the mid-1990s. They complained to the Russian government about abusive treatment, which included denying Russian citizenship to Meskhetian Turks. This turned many Meskhetians into internally displaced people since they could not obtain residency permits or passports.

Since the early 1990s these people have been refugees in their own country, explains William Thompson (not his real name) a strategy coordinator with the International Mission Board (IMB) who is

working to bring the Gospel to the Meskhetians.

"More than 10,000 Meskhetian Turks have now been resettled in the United States by our government," he said. "Southern Baptist churches have a wonderful opportunity to reach out to this community."

As Krasnodar unveiled their statue, one Meskhetian Turk family worked through final details of their departure. Days away from emigrating to the United States, they were feeling the tension of change and the unknown.

"The government wouldn't let us live," said Erdem Akar (not her real name)

"Particularly in the Krasnodar Krai, they wouldn't let us live in peace. They wouldn't let our people work. Our neighbors were fair, but others would... tell us to move. We can't live like this. Cossacks came into our area and went house to house, telling us to leave."

Such dark days are now behind Akar and his family. One brother, who immigrated ahead of them, waited in Pennsylvania. There is sorrow mixed with anticipation. They learned not everyone in their extended family would make the move. Another brother and his wife did not qualify as immigrants. U.S. officials said Akar's brother had not supplied sufficient documents to prove he and his wife were residents of the Krasnodar Krai region. Such resident documents are vital since only Meskhetian Turks living in the Krasnodar Krai are eligible for this particular resettlement program.

"This is hard to take," Akar said. "We're used to living together. We can't think how it will be living separated from one another. We will move and start the requests needed to get our last brother to America."

Despite this setback, Akar is excited about his future. "The most important thing we look for in America is kindness from people and respect as people. We just want to be treated normally and for people to respect us."

Thompson reflects on deeper opportunities for Meskhetian Turks in America.

"Our Southern Baptist churches send us (Southern Baptist workers) all around the world to tell others about Jesus, but here is a people group coming to where our churches are. What an opportunity. I'm praying that churches will step up and join us in this work."

Persecuted immigrants land in America with hope for future

HARRISBURG, Pa. (BP) — It was late and the crowds had thinned out at the airport outside Harrisburg, Pa., except for a small group huddled at the far end of the arrival terminal.

After two exhausting days of travel, months of preparation, and a lifetime of hope, two brothers along with their wives and children had finally made it to their new home.

Erdem Akar (not his real name) and his family are Meskhetian Turks, a people group uprooted from their homeland more than 60 years ago. Originally from the Republic of Georgia, the Meskhetian Turks were deported en masse in 1944 under orders of Josef Stalin to countries all across Central Asia.

The Akar family story begins in Uzbekistan, where they settled after the deportation. In 1989, they were forced from their homes again when organized persecution directed specifically at the Meskhetian Turks broke out.

The family fled to the Krasnodar Krai region of Russia, though living conditions there proved far from favorable. Persecuted for their heritage and shunned because of their ethnicity, the family came to the United States as refugees in search of a place to call home.

The brothers arrived in Pennsylvania on Sept. 13, 2006, with hopes of a new start. Another brother

and his family arrived as refugees only three months earlier and were now standing on the airport's curb to welcome their extended family.

After looking around, Akar described his first impressions with few words: "It's so beautiful. It's like a fairy tale."

Arm in arm, the family took it all in as streams of overlapping, excited conversation mixed with spontaneous laughter echoed down the street. A breeze cooled cheeks wet with tears of joy. The fairy tale was becoming reality.

On the ground next to them sat everything they owned, packed away in plaid suitcases labeled with their last name and final destination: Lancaster, Pa. The family had held

their collective breath for months as they worked through the approval process and sold their home and most belongings.

Everything rested on the success of their move but now, standing on the streets of Pennsylvania, it was safe to exhale.

Joining Akar and his family were several new faces who had helped make the transition possible: Laura Stammberger, who works with a Christian refugee resettlement program, as well as two families from churches in the Lancaster area who had agreed to host the newcomers until they found permanent residence.

They have made it to America.